Autumn is good time to go fishing

With Autumn's cooling temperatures, freshwater game fish become increasing active, embarking on foraging sprees to stock up on energy for the coming dormant months of winter.

During these pre-winter months, Central Virginia's many rivers, lakes and farm ponds become a veritable paradise for anglers seeking a sporting encounter with a piscatorial adversary.

In rivers such as the James, the smallmouth bass become more active as the water temperatures fall, pursuing minnows, and other aquatic animals through the fast running water and riffles, and into the slower, deeper water near feeder creeks and natural holes.

Two popular methods of fishing rivers such as the James include wading and floating.

Many of the rivers in Central Virginia have been readily accessible to wading fisherman this summer because of the extended period of dry weather and consequent low water levels.

Given the low level of many local rivers, it is likely that fishermen will be able to wade their favorite waters until water temperatures become prohibitive.

Floating through productive stretches of water on the James and other rivers is another popular method of Autumn angling.

While a shallow-draft aluminum boat will suffice for float fishing, a canoe is preferrable, particularly in light of the low water levels characteristic of most local rivers this fall.

Anglers considering a float trip should locate a spot for putting their boat in the water, and one for taking their boat out of the water. And, naturally, these spots should have space to park a vehicle, and the angler should have, if necessary, permission to use the locations.

Casting artificial lures or live bait in the eddies behind large rocks and riffles in running water is a favorite method of fishing rivers such as the James.

The angler should carry a variety of lures and/or bait, as on any given day the fish might respond to a particular lure or bait while ignoring others.

Central Virginia offers a bonanza of impounded waters to the angling enthusiast, waters ranging from the famous "acre farm pond" to the massive expanses of Buggs Island and Smith Mountain Lakes.

In impoundments, as in rivers, fish become more active as the water temperatures drop and their biological calendar/clocks tell them the cold months are coming.

Largemouth bass, sunfish, chain pickerel, crappies and other species of game fish begin to invade the shallows in lakes and ponds in search of small aquatic life as the shadows grow longer in the fall.

In the larger lakes such as Buggs Island and Smith Mountain, the crappies, stripers and bass will start to congregate in schools, and lucky is the angler who locates one of these masses of game fish.

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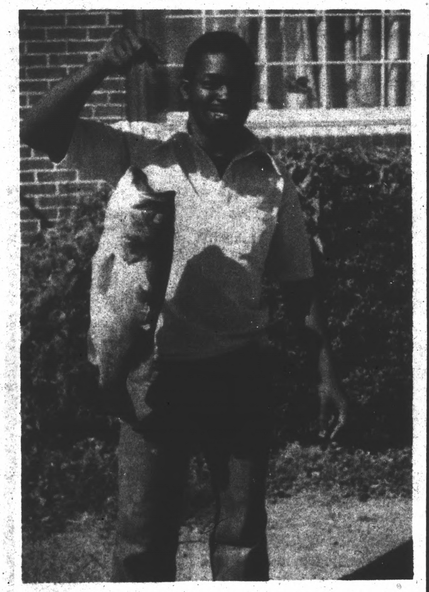
GAY EVANS OF APPOMATTOX is shown holding a five pound, eight ounce smallmouth bass that she caught last year from the James River. The fish, which Gay had mounted, hit a "Tiny Torpedo" surface lure while Gay was on a floatfishing trip downstream from Bent Creek. The 23-inch-long fish garnered a Virginia state citation.



SMALL PONDS COME ALIVE WITH LARGEMOUTH BASS in the autumn. Here Martin Fleshman shows an eight-pound bass he took from Phoebe's pond near Concord recently. The lunker hit a Mepps spinner bait.

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Billy Herndon, a Brookneal resident and sportfishing enthusiast who fishes the big lakes of Central Virginia says that it is not unusual to find largemouth bass and stripers schooling together in the fall.

In general, the fish move into the shallower water and patrol the stumps, brushpiles and other structure in search of food.

Anglers fishing at night in the big lakes continue to enjoy successful striper fishing in the fall, according to Herndon. In Buggs Island Lake, the fall striper fishing is particularly good from Grassy Creek down to the dam.

On a smaller scale, the fish in farm ponds and watershed ponds also become more accessible to the angler in the fall.

Many small farm ponds, often overlooked by fishermen who beat a path to the larger lakes, harbor fish of awesome proportions for a bait to fall within reach.

Whatever an angler's preference -- rivers, lakes or small ponds -- Autumn is a golden time for taking to the waters in search of trophy game fish.

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